

FRENCH REVOLUTION AS A WORLD
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proclaimed. Though no one of note except
Brissot and
Condorcet asked for a republic till the autumn
of 1790, the
spell of monarchy had been broken and the path
lay open to
the onrush of undisciplined democracy.

After Paris had struck at the absolute monarchy
the peasants
in many parts of France rose against the
chateaux. Stories of
destruction, which we may read in the pages of
Taine, came
flooding into Versailles, and on August 3, 1789,
the Assembly
was informed that property was at the mercy of
brigands and
that no castle or convent was safe. The revolt
against feudal
burdens might have been foreseen, but the crisis
found the
Government unprepared. The Court advised the
nobles that
nothing but speedy surrender could save them,
and Barere
warned them that his friends would move the
abolition of
feudal and fiscal privilege. They determined to
anticipate the
attack by capitulation, and at a conference on the
same evening
a wealthy Duke was deputed to announce the
voluntary sacri-
fice of his order. The drama of August 4 has often
been de-
scribed—how the owners of vast estates and the
bearers of
historic names laid their immemorial privileges
on the altar of
the fatherland ; how the nobles surrendered their
feudal dues,
their jurisdiction, their immunity from taxation,
their monopoly
of high office, their game laws ; how serfdom was
abolished
and all employments were thrown open to all
classes; how
the clergy, vying with the *noblesse*, bared their
bosoms to the
sacrificial knife and proposed the commutation of
tithe. History
was being made so quickly that a member at
one moment
passed a note to the President begging him to
adjourn, as the
members were losing their heads ; but the appeal
was in vain.
The sitting continued far into the night, and when
it concluded
a peaceful revolution had been accomplished or

at any rate inaugurated. The demolition of feudalism, the story of which has been authoritatively told in Aulard's *La Revolution et le Regime Feodal*, was not completed till 1793 ; but the Rubicon had been crossed. The absolute monarchy had disappeared with the Bastille, and the power of the *noblesse* was shattered on August 4. Historic France was melting like snow before the sun. As far back as January i Abbe Sieves had published his celebrated pamphlet *QtSest ce que k Tiers Etat* ? " We must ask ourselves three questions. First: What is the Third Estate ? Everything. Second : What has it been hitherto in our political system ? Nothing. Third : What does it ask ? To become something." Its ambition had now been realized.